



Department of Justice

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Southern District of Indiana**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, September 8, 2009

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FORMER VERMILLION COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR CHARGED WITH THEFT OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

PRESS RELEASE

Indianapolis - Ramon J. Columbo, 69, Clinton, Indiana, was charged today with federal program theft, announced Timothy M. Morrison, United States Attorney, Southern District of Indiana, following an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security and Indiana State Police.

The charge alleges that from October 7, 2005 until June 13, 2008, Columbo committed federal program theft by obtaining more than \$19,000 worth of property paid for by the federal government and then converting it to his own use.

Columbo was appointed Director of the Vermillion County Emergency Management Agency (VCEMA) by the Vermillion County Commissioners in 1989 and continuously served in that capacity until his retirement on September 30, 2008. In his capacity as VCEMA Director, Columbo also directed the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP), an entity established to neutralize the VX nerve gas stored by the government in Vermillion County. The Federal Emergency Management Agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security provided funding to the CSEPP.

Sargent Electric Company of Terre Haute routinely contracted with VCEMA and CSEPP to provide services and equipment validly needed by those agencies. However, on certain occasions, Columbo approached Sargent Electric Company officials and asked them to hide certain specific purchases in otherwise legitimate contracts with the county. Columbo led Sargent Electric to believe that these items were to be used by the county but, since they had not specifically been approved, they should not be itemized or in any way noted in the formal contract documents. Based upon these requests by Columbo, Sargent Electric provided the requested property and concealed the nature of the purchases but added the charges. The items

obtained in this manner included three LCD televisions, kitchen appliances and a Kubota tractor. Each of these items was ultimately obtained by Columbo and used exclusively for his own purposes and not that of any government agency. The aggregate value of these items is \$19,196.61. The invoices in which these purchases were hidden were paid by Vermillion County between October 2005 and June 2008. These items were received by Columbo over the same time period.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney James M. Warden, who is prosecuting the case for the government, Columbo faces a maximum of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. An initial hearing will be scheduled before a U.S. Magistrate Judge.

An information is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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